EPSOM & EWELL TIMES
For the community, by the community. A not-for-profit service

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“Imagine this house is in Epsom” says our man in Ukraine.

8 March 2023



Epsom based **Surrey Stands With Ukraine**’s charity director returned from Ukraine recently. Interviewed yesterday by Epsom and Ewell Times (E&ET).

E&ET: Why did you go?
Lionel Blackman: The fantastic Epsom and Ewell team of volunteers of Surrey Stands With Ukraine has raised over £380,000 from the generous public and sent over £1 million worth of donated supplies to Ukraine over this first year of the War. A charity should know those who distribute aid on its behalf and after one year it was time to meet some of our Ukraine partners in person.

Photo is of a destroyed house in the Ukrainian village of Moschun just north of Kyiv.

E&ET: Who did you meet?
LB: We have supported a variety of groups relieving the civilian victims of the war. I met a team of English women who help refugees at the Polish border railway station of Przemsyl. Groups based in Kyiv who send our supplies to Ukrainians who continue to live near the front-line, who evacuate elderly and children from such areas and who are helping rebuild communities whose homes have been destroyed.

E&ET: Was your visit worthwhile?
LB: In Ukraine I just spent one and a half nights in hotels, half a night in an air raid shelter and one night on a train. It was deliberately a short visit so not to distract our partners from their vital volunteer work and their ordinary paid employment. But still, getting to know them better and being fully satisfied as to their commitment to honest and selfless voluntary charitable service is important for our own charity, our wonderful volunteers and our donors. We can continue with ever more confidence that we are doing the right thing and spending the funds appropriately.

E&ET: What did you see of the war?
LB: There were drone attacks on Kyiv the night I stayed hence half of it spent underground. Hosts told me that the air raid sirens sound every other night. Is Putin trying to wear you all down? I asked. “Never, he will never do that”. This is the thing. Putin is uniting a nation he thought he could divide.

I visited Moschun. The defenders of this village held the line and stopped the Russian army getting to nearby Kyiv last year. Most of the homes are destroyed. The Negotiator’s Annual Estate Agents Awards organised by our charity’s trustee and Epsom resident Grant Leonard, raised funds for 20 generators that we sent to Moschun with the assistance of local Epsom, district, national and Kyiv Rotary.

E&ET: When will the war end?
LB: A charity can’t get involved in the politics but personally I am of the opinion that Putin needs to be defeated militarily and the people of Russia have to turn against this war before it will end.

It is the UK Government’s role to aid foreign military. A charity can only support civilians whose lives should not be attacked in any war. In this war civilians are being killed and maimed and made homeless in their thousands.

Surrey Stands With Ukraine and the great public of **Epsom and Ewell** and beyond have to help the civilian victims for the long haul *and keep giving*.

Just imagine that once beautiful house in the photo was in Epsom?

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